

CHIMERA

A LITERARY QUARTERLY

Volume 1

1942-1943

KRAUS REPRINT CORPORATION

New York

1966

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Printed in U.S.A.

THE CHIMERA

A Rough Beast

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Published periodically at 35 cents a copy. Editorial offices: 311 Foulke Hall, Princeton, N. J. Unsolicited manuscripts not returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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Raison d'Etre



"... It is more important that your work should go on now than it has ever been at any other time in our history: in a very literal sense you carry upon your bookshelves the light that guides civilization. I need not labor the contrast between the estate of books in the free democracies and the estate of books in countries brutalized by our foes.

We all know that books burn—yet we have the greater knowledge that books can not be killed by fire. People die, but books never die. No man and no force can abolish memory. No man and no force can put thought in a concentration camp forever. No man and no force can take from the world the books that embody man's eternal fight against tyranny of every kind. In this war, we know, books are weapons. And it is a part of your dedication always to make them weapons for man's freedom."

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, in
A Message to the Booksellers of America
May 6, 1942

SUCH is the partial justification we offer for starting a new literary magazine at such an unseasonable time. But the magnificence of the President's message awes us a bit. Our purpose is more modest: to try to provide a medium for serious writers, with emphasis on the younger ones. They are intimately in contact with the war and often have vitality and freshness that years of being literary lions have dulled in many of the older.

It is an ominous sign that several of America's most distinguished quarterlies should be forced to suspend activities for the duration. It would seem that the very standards and values we are fighting to preserve are being sacrificed in the effort. But it is not the particular virtue of the military mind to be far sighted. However, the British government's insistence that *Punch*, *The Illustrated London News*, and *The Musical Times* should be kept going at all costs is heartening. Likewise is the fight the smaller periodicals like *Horizon* and *Life and Letters Today* are putting up to exist despite harrowing difficulties.

The reader may push the symbolic significance of the three part nature of the chimera as far as he wishes. The lion, goat, and snake all have admirable as well as unsavory qualities. We ask the reader to be indulgent. Anyway, we hope it will be tough enough to survive the hardships of a war-time birth.

This first issue, which tends to be more miscellaneous than integrated, was assembled under the confusion and distraction of the first spring of America's active role in the global war. In the fall, Hitler and Hershey willing, we shall try to turn out "bigger and better" numbers, including more critical articles and some short stories. Finally, a word of gratitude for the generosity of the contributors who made this issue possible.

—F. B.

Symposium

By Carlos Baker



To murder ignominious months and days,
To certify that the dead hour has died,
To bury, burn, obliterate the phrase,
The deed, the lust, the ignorance, the pride;
Not to invite propinquity with prayer,
Cement disclaimed relationship in stone,
Or, tangled in a garland of bright hair,
To white the sepulchre of rotting bone.
So has he willed. Still the unsummoned faces
Of old and recent ignobilities
Enforce their presence, elbow to their places,
Nor wonder that their host is ill at ease.
He knows his portion ashes and gall. They start
Their eucharistic banquet on his heart.

1938: Tales from the Vienna Woods

By Randall Jarrell



The reflections in the forest of the dying child
Are feverish and uneducated, and begin to tremble
At the footsteps of the ogre, who is night, and kind.
We do not move: the cries stop so soon.

The atoms are no longer conserved; annihilation
Is the tomorrow of the unwilling. The imperious wings
Are spread to the humble, who accept a rule
Conclusive as sleep; and the rattle of the waltzes

Sweeps high and guessed and gone over the crowds
Who will breathe glory for their day, and find no air
That night in the chambers of the clumsy spectre,
Who is lost; who cries all night: "I have lost my way—"

Because he is blind. What eyes could miss the road?
Look, look! By the signs of the bones,
The dreams in the glades of the shell-wood, and death's
Means in the disaster of all life, the dead,

Way by way, to the river of iron,
March in their long magnificence, their gazes flung
To the shattering future. Who hears the spectre
Who is blind and cries, "My way is gone"?

Midland

By Mark Van Doren



Under the great cold lakes, under the midmost
Parallel that Lisbon too lies under—
Vesuvius and Corinth, Aarat,
Peking and Chosen, yellow and blue seas
Enormous, then the redwoods, then high Denver—
Under the wet midnorth, under cool Canada,
Swings my own West, directionless: the temperate,
The tacit, the untold. There was I born,
There fed upon the dish of dreaming land
That feeds upon itself, forever sunk
From the far rim, from crust and outer taste,
Forever lost and pleased, as circling currents
Swim to themselves, renumbering Sargasso
Centuries that a wind brings round the world.
There am I still, if no thought can escape
To edges from that soft and moving center,
That home, that floating grave of what would fly
Yet did not: my own boyhood, meditating
Unto no end, eternal where I was.

THE STUDY OF SYMBOLIC ACTION

By *Kenneth Burke*



THE PROPOSAL here is to consider poetry as a kind of *action* rather than as a kind of *knowledge*. This is a “dramatic” approach to poetry, as against the customary “epistemological” approach which has flourished along with the prestige of science.

“Knowledge” and “action” are not antithetically related, however. Since they are not paired like “yes and no,” or “up and down,” the consideration of poetry as a kind of action does not rule out the consideration of poetry as a kind of knowledge. We may say that, in action, or through action, a man is “transformed,” or “realizes himself”—and in this sense, vicarious participation in poetry as a symbolic act may be said to lead into “knowledge.” But it is my contention that the most direct approach to an understanding of a poet’s strategy, as embodied in a poem’s structure, will be got through the approach in terms of action, with considerations of knowledge figuring secondarily.

* * *

Note that the expression, “symbolic action,” has dialectic possibilities. We can stress either the noun or the modifier. We can say “*symbolic* action” or “symbolic *action*.” I shall here consider the major implications of both emphases, beginning with the stress upon the noun.

The quickest way to argue for this approach is to indicate its serviceability as a way of placement. Consider, for instance, how it serves to place the three modes of expression, poetic, scientific, and rhetorical, with reference to one another. Thus we have:

poetry as action (a kind of action: symbolic action)

science as *preparation* for action (reconnaissance: the gathering of facts about the grounds, or scene, of action, in preparation for a rational plan of action)

rhetoric as *inducement* to action.

As regards our needs of the moment, this alignment also has the advantage of salvaging the category of rhetoric. Many, alienated by the excesses of commercial advertising and political propaganda, have in recent years been prone to distrust rhetoric *per se*. Not liking the particular rhetoric they saw about them, they expanded their resentment to include all rhetoric. Similarly, many liberals who objected to the Marxist rhetoric (in plays, novels, poems, etc.) frequently phrased their objections as "thoroughly" as possible by treating "poetry" and "rhetoric" as categorically opposed to each other, and categorically welcoming "poetry" while categorically excluding "rhetoric."

This position was always untenable, but the war situation has made its insufficiencies more apparent. For obviously, the conduct of a war is greatly assisted by literary expression that induces to the acts and attitudes helpful in the conducting of the war. And one certainly cannot equate such inducement with mere false statement (as with the categorical objection to rhetoric).

Rhetoric, approached in terms of action, is found to have a rightful role. And there may be a "good" rhetoric and a "bad" rhetoric. But when rhetoric is approached from the epistemological point of view, as a kind of drugged information, it becomes simply an inferior brand of knowledge. Considered "semantically," all rhetoric takes on the quality of "bad" rhetoric. Yet, actually, the deployments of rhetoric are not to be judged merely as "true" or "false." There are diplomatic ways of admitting unpleasant truths, or of so presenting agreeable ones as to make the most of them. As so presented, information may induce in us a different frame of mind than we might derive from a report of the mere "facts" themselves. Indeed, such "mere facts" owe

much of their significance to the context in which they are considered, and there is no fixed semantic rule determining what this context shall be.

This approach should also serve quickly to displace the controversies based upon a categorical opposition between poetry and rhetoric. There are three distinctions here: action, preparation for action, inducement to action—and one cannot reduce them to two without getting something too cumbersome to enlighten us. As regards the poetry-rhetoric pair: we may note that both poetry and rhetoric use weighted vocabulary. They are thus alike in that they both employ terms that exploit attitudes and form attitudes. But a work is “poetic” where it gives us attitudes that are complete in themselves; and it is “rhetorical” where it gives us attitudes that call for completion in a further act, outside the confines of the work.

* * *

Whereas both poetry and rhetoric aim at the use of “weighted” or “emotionally charged” words, the scientific (semantic) vocabulary aims at “neutrality.” So we may use the analogy of “reconnaissance”—the scientific vocabulary seeking to describe a scene in terms devoid of partisanship. If a map is correctly, scientifically, drawn, it is “neutral,” in that we and our enemies would interpret it similarly. There is a paradox here: a plane on reconnaissance duty is engaged on the most partisan of tasks, yet it seeks the most impartial of information. Its occupants would know exactly the facts that the enemy knows; they would know precise, “impartial” things about the ground or scene of possible military action.

There is, of course, a principle of selection operating here. For there is an infinity of things to note about the enemy’s territory. And a selection from this infinity is made, for the particular purposes in view. Yet, within these limits, the aim is to know exactly how things are, to make an impartial report on the ground (scene, situation), so that tacticians may plan an act suited to the nature of the scene.

* * *

I like to think of Hamlet as the scientific Christ. As the image of Christ's agony introduced and guided the forms of Christian culture, so the image of Hamlet's agony foretells and recapitulates our scientific civilization. Hamlet's problem was scientific, a problem of knowledge. He was not afraid to act; it was not out of cowardice, or sloth, or selfishness, or any other motive in the order of vices, that he delayed. He delayed because he was unsure of the relevant facts. When he had made up his mind as to what the situation really was, he acted.

Here, in a great tragedy, we see the laying of a cornerstone. We watch an increased sensitivity to the problems of investigation *preparatory* to the act. And we see how the *preparation* for an act threatens to become instead the *substitute* for an act. So likewise we know of students who, attending school to study in preparation for living, linger instead, to become perpetual students, making the whole of life a kind of unending preparation that is the same as an unending delay. (I would except here the Goethean insight, the vision of life itself, even the fullest life, as a process of learning, a development from apprentice, to journeyman, to master. Here is an idealized aspect of the scientific, another side of Hamlet.) An obvious variant is to be seen in the standard parliamentary device of killing a measure by calling for more data, further study.

* * *

Scientific reconnaissance involves inspection of ground, or scene. Religious doctrines of motivation had similarly begun with reference to scene, it being felt that the quality of our actions is derived from the quality of the scene in which we, as agents, enacted them. But in the religious frame the quality of the scene was not in question. The scene of our acts was "substantially" of the same quality as its creator: as such it was "substantially" personal and divine.

In modern science, the circumference of the scene was narrowed to naturalistic limits. The concept of scene was no longer so broad as to include a creator as a necessary part of the definition. Science thus made doubt more possible, by restricting the

concept of scene to limits that made investigation more possible.

The religious frame is thoroughly dramatic. The scientific frame, in restricting the circumference of the scene, is rather the preparation for drama (this is another way of saying that the scientific is preparation for action). Thus, looking again at *Hamlet*, we see the paradox to which the play nearly succumbed:

Here Shakespeare made a drama out of the preparation for drama. Thus, it threatened to be no drama at all. We see Shakespeare here poignantly at a watershed moment. His art, arising out of a feudal, religious, essentially dramatic perspective, is here seen to be ushering in the scientific, essentially non-dramatic perspective. Towards the end of the era, we see in O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* a somewhat similar situation. At the end of the trilogy, Lavinia becomes a sheer automaton. She thus ceases to be an agent; and this means the dissolution of action, the dissolution of drama. As the play ends, in fact, there is no action at all, but mere movement, mere "behavior." The dramatist accordingly conveys this final stage of her development by stage-directions alone. We are told that Lavinia

... ascends to the portico—and then turns and stands for a while, stiff and square-shouldered, staring into the sunlight with frozen eyes. Seth leans out of the window at the right of the door and pulls the shutters closed with a decisive bang. As if this were a word of command, Lavinia pivots sharply on her heel and marches woodenly into the house, closing the door behind her.
Curtain.

The trilogy is necessarily over. For Lavinia, having ceased to be a person, having become instead a mere Response to a Stimulus, was no longer capable of action. We have gone from the dramatic to the behavioristic, from action to motion. O'Neill thereafter, if he would remain a dramatist without adopting a contemporary philosophy of political action, would have to return to his Catholic beginnings, from which he had strayed, first satanistically, and here quasi-scientifically.

* * *

We began by discussing action with relation to *knowledge*. We might now bracket it differently, with relation to *motion*, a word

that, in itself or in synonyms, came into great favor with the rise of materialistic science. For science, as knowledge reduced to the limits of the naturalistic scene, thus aims at reduction to motion. It would convert the affections into their corresponding material equivalents, thus clearly making for the dissolution of drama. For in drama the passions are the counterparts of actions; but in non-dramatic terminologies they are the recording of physical responses to physical stimuli.

Positivistic, behavioristic, physicalist, operationalist theories of meaning are all, as seen from the perspective of "dramatism," making for the dissolution of drama. Dramatistically, *motion is deduced from action*. That is, a man acts, and uses the resources of motion as a condition or instrumentality of his action; he sets in motion the kinds of motion that serve the purposes of his act. But scientifically, *action is reduced to motion*. That is, the act is dissolved into an arc of motion, an adjustment or behavior, a complex of vibrations responding to other vibrations.

We are not here considering the matter invidiously. We are discussing it as illustration of what we mean by "dramatism" (or the featuring of the category of "action") as a way of placing significant cultural trends. There are reasons to believe that the trend towards dissolution of drama is a normal one (along with compensations, such as with the political philosophies) that reaffirm the category of action.

* * *

There are five major terms in the "dramatistic" perspective: act, scene, agent, agency, purpose. These terms are miracles of an everyday sort. People use them constantly, though often in disguised forms.

Scene. We speak of the literary *scene*, or the *scene* of action, etc. Or, what is almost the same, we speak of a *theatre* of war. But there are less obvious synonyms in constant use. In political discussions, for instance, we generally use the word, "situation." We say, not "What scene motivated his act?" but "What was the political situation affecting him?" Other synonyms are: ground, background, environment, period, age. Or words for specific

scenes, such as feudalism, capitalism, the Ice Age, Chicago, Times Square. In general, we may note that the quality of the scene implicitly contains the quality of the act. Thus, different action is to be expected from a naturalistic stage-set showing a middle-class parlor than from the odd shapes of an Expressionistic stage-set. This relationship between act and scene has a great bearing upon our theories of motivation. If a man does something, for instance, you can place an entirely different light upon his act depending upon the scene you select for it. You may place it in a very confined setting, for instance, embracing only personal relations between him and another. Or you may extend it to broader naturalistic limits (such as involve general notions of individual or group "survival"). Or you may even locate the act with relation to a supernatural ground of action. The quality of the act changes with the scope of the frame in which you locate it.

Act. Any verb having connotations of consciousness. "He lied." "He helped me." "He summoned them." We may also note such long-term variants as we get in work, job, profession, vocation, strategy, tactics, tao, hodos, yoga. Our term "position" and the French *bureau de placement* indicate again the close relation between act and scene.

Agent. Person, actor, character, individual. Hero, villain. Father, doctor, engineer. Also, derivatively, a "patient" (for implicit in the concepts of action there are the concepts of passion).

Agency. The instruments or means. Machines are agencies.

Purpose. Aim, intention, end.

The terms are clear enough, if looked at quickly. The person (agent) does something (act) in some situation (scene) by some means (agency) to bring about some result (purpose). And the whole pentad is always present, in some form, in any complete statement about motives.

But the terms can readily be made obscure. Machines are means, for instance; but when they have accumulated they are, in their vast accumulation, decidedly scenic—and as such they form an important element in the situation motivating our acts.

The terms are like the five fingers. Each is distinct, yet they

all merge in the hand. Thus, though the terms can be seen as distinct, so also they merge into one another. And by reason of this overlap we may convert one into another. Is a man's body, for instance, "personal" or "scenic"? Tools as means are agencies; as accumulations they are of the scene; and as products of human invention they may be treated as aspects of human creativity (an attribute of the term, agent). Thus, philosophies can feature one term or another—and by reason of the overlap among the terms can reduce some of them to others. I have considered this at length elsewhere. I shall give but a smattering here:

Materialism features the term, scene. It is always centering motivational factors in the environmental, the situational. Idealism features the agent. We can see this most quickly in idealistic philosophies of art, stressing creativity, sensibility, temperament, or some such. Pragmatism obviously stresses reduction of the terms to agency. A tool is an agency, the hand that operates it is an agency, the muscles that move the hand are an agency, the brain that guides the muscles is an agency, the intelligence that directs the brain is an agency, the educational system that trains the intelligence is an agency, and so on. The quickest way to realize that mysticism features purpose is to reflect that whenever a theorist offers an account of motives eliminating a reference to purpose (teleology) he heralds his accomplishment as the avoidance of the mystical.

Realism, we treat as a synonym for "dramatism," in that it features the term, act. Examine Aristotle with this terministic perspective in view, and you will discern the strategic role played by this term in philosophy. God is defined as "pure act." Even his physics is treated in terms of active and passive. And, of course, he places the major emphasis upon plot or fable (action) in his *Poetics*. (It is in modern idealism that the agent attained major stress, as in the subjective novel. And the "scientific" novel stresses background, or scene, as motivational centre.) Thomist realism, shaped about Aristotle, also puts the major stress upon the act, thus keeping the essentially dramatic point of view.

As for the paradoxes whereby action and passion become re-

versed, we may note that one could speak either of the "acts" of the martyrs or of the "passionals." Or, considering another kind of conversion, we may note the turn from the "Christian passion" to the "romantic passion."

* * *

Turning now to the other emphasis, *symbolic* action: having written a great deal about it elsewhere (*Attitudes Toward History* and *The Philosophy of Literary Form*), I shall here confine myself to the major arguments.

To recover the significance of Aristotle's statement, that the work must have a beginning, middle, and end, I should propose to think of it thus: a work of art is a *development* or *transformation* that proceeds *from* something, *through* something, *to* something. We may thus find in it attenuated or secularized variants of transubstantiation, conversion, rebirth. Particularly in understanding the art of today we would do well to see art in this way. For the pronounced reordering of the political scene calls for acts of symbolic rebirth, as the poet ritualistically casts off an old identity and adopts a new one (or pictures his characters as doing so); and the preference for secular terminologies, particularly in the political philosophies, generally causes these symbolizations of justification, purification, sacrifice, rebirth, communion, and the like to assume a non-religious, or even an anti-religious guise.

My basic assumption is that modern secular thought has not abandoned the religious processes, but has concealed them beneath deceptively secular trappings—and a close inspection of the best secular poetry will disclose these processes. Indeed, you will not fully understand the deployments of poetry until you consider it from this point of view. A word much liked today is "dialectic"—and a dialectic series is a series of transformations. Hence to consider a poem or play or novel as a dialectic is to consider it as exemplifying, radically or in attenuation, a process of conversion, rebirth, transcendence.

* * *

In order that one's interpretations be not arbitrary here, one has two kinds of resources. By inspecting the particular work be-

fore him, he will find in its own substance, what it departs from, what it develops through, and what it arrives at. He will find some kind of opposed principles, such as night-day, inner-outer, male-female, personal-impersonal, child-adult, city-country, here-elsewhere, waking-dream, individual-group, men-machines, democracy-dictatorship. Or he will find various combinations and recombinations of such. And he will establish their existence by explicit reference to the works themselves.

The other resource is the use of "leads" available from all the collective lore of philosophy, theology, the sciences. Let him consider much of it, so that he has a wide range of possibilities to choose from, and can even discard much without being impoverished for an explanation. Psychology and anthropology have offered many perceptions that make us sensitive to the presence of rebirth processes. The crucial issues in theology can often, *mutatis mutandis*, be seen to have their contemporary parallels. (Indeed, let one use a bit of imagination in reading a dictionary of old heresies, sects, and schisms, and he will find their vital analogues in our political attitudes today.)

Also, it is good to watch closely the fragments of folk philosophy preserved in proverbs and fables. For they mark out typical recurrent human situations and typical ways of dealing with them. And when we have seen them thus clearly, we may trace the same lineaments through the strategies and tactics of more complex and sophisticated works.

The work of art is an enactment. Being constitutive, it survives as a structure, or "constitution," after the act of its production. It is thus to be studied as both act and object. Studying it as an object, we trace the steps of its internal development, from what, through what, to what. Studying it as act, we may reach out to borrow from all the lore available in our accumulated philosophies of action and motive.

(*Editor's Note:* This is a version condensed by Mr. Burke from his *Mesures* Lecture delivered at Princeton University in the spring of 1942.)

Waltz in the Branches

By Federico Garcia Lorca

TRANSLATED BY JUAN LOPEZ



A leaf fell
then two
then three.
A fish went swimming past
the moon.
The water sleeps an hour
and the white sea a hundred.
The lady was dead upon the branch.
The nun sang within the citron.
The maiden went from pine to pine cone
and the pine
searched for the feathery trill.
But the nightingale cried its
wounds all around.
And I also because a leaf fell
and two
and three
and a crystal head
and a paper violin
and the snow could overcome the world
if the snow slept for a month
and the branches strove with the world
one by one
two by two
and three by three.
Oh, hard ivory of flesh invisible
Oh, abyss without ants of the dawn.
There will come a torso of Shadow

crowned with laurel.
The heavens will be for the wind
hard as a wall
and the branches torn loose
will go dancing with him.
One by one around the moon
two by two around the sun
and three by three
that the ivories may have deep sleep. .

Painted Carousel

By Thomas Barbour



Down the dark street I came
And at the sudden corner:
Life and child-laughter—
Painted carousel—

Clutter of children clutching
Pennies for passage—
Clatterjangle of music—
Red horses, yellow unicorns.

The dead in the windows lean
To the sun—white arms defined
By bluerolled sleeves. A woman
Shakes out a sheet.

The dead in the windows rest,
Drinking the sun. Then turn
To darkness, remembering awhile
The whirling laughter.

To Ford Madox Ford

By Allen Tate



PERHAPS Ford knew in the winter of 1939 that he was going to die soon, for he went to France in the spring to spend the summer, as he had not done for several years; he had been going over in the autumn and coming back to America in the spring. It was well that he died in France, a country that he not only loved but that he represented far more than he ever did England, his native country. It is not too much to say that he was a French man of letters who wrote his principal works first in English, then rewrote them in French. He was a man of letters too on the French model of the mid-nineteenth century: a man of "culture" who had survived into an age that no longer assumed the autonomy of the arts but had gone off into varieties of neo-primitivism or into "politics." As the heir of Flaubert and the avowed disciple of Henry James, Ford believed passionately in the novel as a form of art, a distinct *genre* to be explored and developed in terms of form, not of social ideas or of mere subject-matter.

This point of view went into an eclipse at the end of the last decade, giving way to the cruder social-political novel, or even cruder than that, to the personal or expressionist novel of the sort written by the late Thomas Wolfe. And Ford's reputation, after a brief rise in the middle twenties, declined. . . .

But it seems to me that if the novel is to survive the heresies of mere ideology and reporting, it will have to return to the great tradition of Flaubert and James—and of Ford Madox Ford, in whose three or four great books that tradition is most immediately available to us. If the future does not go back to this masterful

tradition, it will have to learn its lesson all over again at great cost of energy and of time. The other, temporarily dominant school purports to teach us about life, and that is perhaps what the public reads for. But it is fatal for a literary artist to get life out of novels; what he must look for is the lesson of form.

Ford touched more phases of contemporary literature than any other man of our time in the Anglo-American world. It was inevitable that he should make innumerable enemies. He will make no more enemies, and the great distinction of his service to literature can now be assessed.

I cannot end this tribute to Ford without some comment upon his qualities as man and friend. In the fifteen years of our friendship I saw in him—as he doubtless saw in me—great faults of character, which seemed to me to proceed from a special romantic sensibility. One fault he did not have: I shall call it the artist's cowardice. He had, as a man of letters, an immense courage; through poverty, through prosperity, through the complications of his personal life, he *wrote*; and in writing he never ceased to explore his medium for new effects or to learn wherever he could. One day he brought me a sentence, and like a young beginner he asked me, a beginner: "Do you think it will do?" He could ask this because the dignity and the unremitting demands of his art came first.

From The House

By William Arrowsmith



The evening folds to umbrage of rain and sleep
Where men of wild speech converge in sounds
And gestures, stopped as still as a wheel:
Riders and walkers through the spokes of speech.
The old sickness returns, far from home,
The nameless fear of night in the bowel-depth
Aching to feel in one room the dear thing,
The porcelain bathroom where your faces grew
Lost as wind in the sewerage of time.
Forgetting these, you still recall at night
The seeping through the wall of words
Your father's comments on the rain and hour.
The echoes of their steps from rooms above,
Like hollow blocks come tumbling down the stair,
And in the chartreuse hall, an oaken plaque,
The Lion of Lucerne keeps jungle watch.
There is no stalking but the sluice of wind,
The wine-dark flowing out of cellar doors,
Of night, of wine, of Bourbon in the glass.
Shadow leaps from hedges in the afternoon;
The instant beasts of evening crouch and gleam.
Listen! the talk of old men has stopped
In comment on the quiet afternoon,
And all their fine high praise for sacrifice
Has ceased. The season freezes at the pane.
Domestic darkness shelves and settles down
Behind doors, in hallways, in kitchens.

The ancient wall is all we've ever kept,
The winding banisters are where we slept.

The martyred man is never dead
And always trembles the established walls
Between what's old and new, right or wrong.
And you reflect the whaling ships are gone
And all the whales are dead. The house alone—
The wall, the glass, the stairs—the doors are shut:
The urge for building being dead you say. . . .

After Mad Grapes

By Robert Wise

“As silent as a mirror is believed
Realities plunge in silence by . . .”

Lying upon our backs in the vineyard, shuddering
We mashed the grapes; mad grapes shrivelled our
throats.

Thirsting in clear water, we flung from the boats;
We drowned shouting in the sand whirl.

Here, we exist and do not exist, images
Among fluid faces, we whirl in elision.
And you who know, know only the separate vision
Of severed sense—the movement seized in a frame.

(Pygmalion mind sculpturing from the five
One statue, you desiring her—the white bride.
You cannot wed, demanding perfect union,
The five sisters seated by the fireside.)

On our bellies beneath the inverted shell of sky,
At lake edge we cupped the water; from our fingers
Falling, blue dust fades. And silently we smiled
With touch of eyes—the mind's world had flown by;
Our heart-beats mingled with the yellow reeds.
Frenzied in the calm of wakened sleep
We wept; and of rejoicing gold drank deep.

POETRY AND SPEECH:

A Letter to William Carlos Williams

By Thomas Barbour



WHEN the editors of *The Chimera* asked me for an article, Dr. Williams, I was thinking of our talk the other weekend; it suggested the subject. I got out your poems and other Williamsiana and began to arrange my own ideas. Then your letter came with your criticism of my work and provided a form for this paper. Your remarks about my own stuff perhaps concern no one but myself, but insofar as they apply to certain professional poets, particularly the bugaboo Eliot, they ought to interest us all.

Mr. Eliot is your favorite scapegoat; you cudgelled him in your conversation, bopped him again in your article in *Trend*, and took another crack at him in your letter. "T. S. Eliot," you said, "is a very bad master, avoid him." I agree; but not in your sense. All great poets are bad influences, to the extent that all great poets are persuasive poets. The disciple loses his originality and becomes the imitator in proportion to his master's persuasiveness. The best masters are the partial poets, those who can suggest ideas and techniques for their followers to complete, correct, improve, and color. But for you Eliot is not only a dangerous influence, he is a bad, bad poet. Why? Because he wasn't properly prepared at his University, because "after being painstakingly inculcated into the service of letters in our country (ha, ha!) he turned his back on them and ran! to England of all places. . . . He had learned nothing whatever in spite of all his instruction," because, I think you will admit it amounts to this, his poetry presumably springs

from literature rather than public speech, public experience. Those are fighting words. Do you mind my examining them a little?

To credit your point we might agree that Eliot is not a spontaneous poet in the sense that Yeats was. I don't know Eliot's writing habits, but it is not difficult to suppose from the limited output of his thirty years as a poet and the complexity of his poems that he must work hard, very hard, on every one of them. You haven't got Harvard to blame for this, but Eliot's own personality. I suspect that if he had not gone to a university he wouldn't be writing at all; but you might still wish to God he never had. On the other hand, though he cannot spin poems with the ease of Yeats or, in fact, William Carlos Williams, hasn't he been rewarded for his labors? With what persuasion! what richness! what intensity!

What do you mean by observation, or experience? Have you read your Eliot? I don't want to make a gospel of him, but let's go to the text. Will introspective observation do? How about these lines, Dr. Williams; no experience?

“And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell
Quickens to recover
The cry of quail and whirling plover . . .”

Or what of this:

“I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.
(She's had five already, and nearly died of
young George.)
The chemist said it would be all right, but I've
never been the same.
You *are* a proper fool, I said.”

Is this just literary? He uses literary references; what then? They don't always come off, but when they do it is just because

they enlarge the original experience, blow it up and out of its local frame to something prep-school English departments like to call Universal. What is a literary emotion, really? Want an example? Well, hold your nose:

*“Democracy—Gem on our ocean of life;
Light-winged tie, that binds the hearts of men
in strife.
With faith unbroken, which has sturdily stood—
And wrote our freedom, with pen and ink of blood.”*

Enough of that.

Then there is this stuff about poetic diction; it's an old story, Dr. Williams. Wordsworth had something to say about it, so did your Imagist friends. But your friends are dead and so would Wordsworth be, if he had nothing more to offer. We thank them kindly for cleaning poetry up a bit (or mussing it up, perhaps). “Use ‘all literary devices, and convenient, “nice sounding” phrases as though they were arsenate of lead,”” you said; but what serious poet since Robert Bridges has really had to be told that? It's a teapot tempest you're stirring up; your literary diction is a phantom, and when you talk about Eliot, though you don't seem to realize it, you are talking about something quite different.

You took exception to my writing of a staircase that it was “woven” of marble. “Woven,” you said, was completely false. Why? Perhaps I should have written “built,” but I have seen the staircase, just a few miles north of Savannah, and, by God, it is woven! I like these lines:

*“Febrile spring moves not to heat
but always more slowly,
burdened by a weight of leaves.”*

But you wrote “febrile,” Dr. Williams; what of that word? False? And Mr. Eliot writes:

“Vacant shuttles | Weave the wind.”

False?

"Go down to the minister's parlor," you said, "and observe, actually, how his wife talks." But don't you see the fallacy: public speech is not public experience. If it were, there wouldn't be any poets; or rather we should all be poets. What are poets trying to do after all: "What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed"—doesn't it amount just about to that when all is said and done? If you want to spend your time with the minister's wife, recording her speech, it's O. K. by me. It will make a quaint little vignette, and, if you do it well enough, the philologists will love you for it.

But, if you'll pardon the suggestion, poetry can do more than that. So very much more.

Museum of Comparative History

By Bernard Heringman



Kitchen middens of the Middle Empire
Beget misgiving in the modern brain,
Presentment of disorder. They lie entire,
Neatly impaled by caution-worked disdain.
Fixed in the narrowed circles of the sun,
They bear the scrutiny of the select
Or relegated few who will not shun
The object of its data. These few collect
Strict observations for the future's muse,
And shelve them in the present, sealed from dust
And dirty hands for safe and sterile use.
They regulate their balance as they must
In airless chambers of uncolored glass
So thick, so impregnable to affairs
Outside, so hushed to rob the sounding brass
Of echo. Shaking air throws out the tares

Too weighty in such perfect rarefaction.
But airlessness itself annihilates;
And men must recess even this abstraction,
In truth, to live, as God still calculates.

Eastward in Eden

By Robert Rock



Two short candles spluttered, muttered, guttered—
Flickered out with a smoke wisp. Wax uttered
The wane—the death sentence—
No time for repentance.

“And there was evening and there was
morning, a fifth day.”

Strong came the molder;
Rent wax from the holder;
Fashioned shoulder for shoulder;
Dropped the spark speck, and the smoulder
Fled into flame. Fear fires love higher,
Melts the charred holder—torch of the past—
Lost at last, consumed in the pyre!
Was it true? It happened so fast!

“And the evening and the morning were a
sixth day.”

Fast? Sped through space with the flash of a spark—
Image that's burnt through your mind in the dark—
Memory soothes diffidence
With a sweet immanence.

“And God blessed the seventh day.”

For A Painting—

By Donald Stauffer



A fat Italian lady
Singing softly to her child,
While hanging in the heavens
Is the mild moon mild.

The Coliseum porches
(Tier on tier, a massy bowl)
Crater-like hem in the planets
From the pole to the pole.

A whisper of old triumphs
And the shouts of "Follow! follow!"
And the prayers of Christian martyrs
Echo hollow, hum hollow.

Justinian and Titus
Watch the red-blood-spurting game,
Looping in their purple togas
Roman fame, fading fame.

The palanquin of Empire
Borne by naked Libyan slaves
Jogs a jolting, wraith-like progress
To the graves, gray graves,
With the ghostly golden standards,
S. and P. and Q. and R.,
Leading two-edged swords to battle
In a far war far.

And hanging in the heavens
Is the mild moon mild,
While a fat Italian lady
Sings soprano to her child.

BOOK REVIEWS

OSCAR WILLIAMS: *New Poems*: 1942

Mr. Oscar Williams presents us with another anthology (this does not mean that we were sent a complimentary copy). From the preface, it would seem that he had amended earlier mistakes of the 1940 anthology, making quite certain that there would be no references from Dunstan Thompson or others pointing him out as "a more than adequate kiss of death." The danger he incurs by several of his observations—the prognostications of a poetic renaissance (it sounds good), the "experience" of the included poems, plus all the limitations of his personal tastes—is obvious, but Mary Colum, not noting the obvious, continues in *The New York Times* the old comments, the customary concomitance of outworn objections to most of modern poetry. Examine her reviews sometime, if you find a moment to break away from *New Poems*: 1942. Conrad Aiken furnishes the excuse for the pause that refreshes after his eternal mouthings about Ruby. Mary doesn't like anybody since 1920 except Robert Frost, and although Robert Frost is no doubt a very nice man, what made us dream that he could comb grey hair? That perhaps is not fair to Frost, but it approaches justification much more nearly than Colum's remarks on the anthology, which, by the way, Williams neatly demolished in a letter-to-the-editor. It is clear that Mary Colum doesn't like Oscar Williams; I don't like Mary Colum. Her mouthwash commentary on what she knows nothing about and cares less is getting rather tiring. Soon she'll drivel as much as Alfred Noyes who sees nothing in modern poetry but the incest note.

The first exhibit in the Williams collection really worth wondering about is Auden. The most remarkable poem of the anthology is probably his *At the Grave of Henry James*. Among the insistent and continuous gropings and self-pities of most of

the Williams poets, this poem by Auden is the one jewel on a not-too-bad slipper, and the real genius of such lines as,

“...O noon but reflects on itself
And the small taciturn stone that is the only witness
To a great and talkative man,
Has no more judgement than my ignorant shadow
Of odious comparisons or distant clocks...”

point to the mediocrity of a great many of the rest. All of which brings us, sooner or later, to Frederic Prokosch. Complexes begin to arise, whether Ulysses or Narcissus. He and the sea have a grand old time; he finds a great many playmates—Trafalgar Square, sandals, Asiatic tents, and a whole lot of people grown hard with hate, multiplied, etc. I suspect that his photograph or rather the two of them is perhaps the truest commentary on his verse. It's an affectation and a fake. The whole group of his poems lack the seal of any sincerity whatsoever. When John Masefield finally got down to the sea, there was nobody there but Frederic having hallucinations and taking pictures of himself.

The anthology is unfortunately marred by the inclusion of several poets who have nothing to say except their own self-love and the too-badness of things. The greats, despite the fact that they have produced work (cf. Eliot's *Dry Salvages* in *Partisan Review*) during the last two years are depressingly omitted. It must be iterated once more, Mr. Williams. Where are Eliot and Pound? Where is Allen Tate? where are the younger men like Horton, Mills, Berryman, so much more valuable than this fusion from Prokosch, Rukeyser, and MacLeish who had better stop listening to the March of Time or he'll begin putting in sound effects at this point Tschaikowsky's 1812 Overture?

Now the bouquets. We think a world of Blackmur—*The Second World* in fact. *Missa Vocis* is a fine piece of work, although we wonder about *The Dead Ride Fast*. After all the tidying up—the washing, shaving, trimming of snakey locks etc.—we gather from his portrait that it didn't do much good. I feel that the predominantly successful poems are those by Schwartz (although as

a whole *Shenandoah* seemed a failure to me), Penn Warren's *Pursuit*, Dylan Thomas's *Ballad of the Long-legged Bait*, John Peale Bishop's *The Hours*, and several others by Jarrell, Spender, Empson, and Karl Shapiro. The six Stevens poems, considered such an event by Frank Jones in *The New Republic*, fail for me at least to be very exciting. I am frankly tired of Marianne Moore, "but they all have grandmothers." The æpyornis, the moa, etc., these "little sand-colored skipping animals" that provide the best release for the major emotions just don't go. Her poems are precise as crystal and God knows a little crystallization would do no harm in some of the 1942 poetry, but the stilted artificiality of the two in the anthology leave little room for comment.

Several contributors have not been mentioned. Nemerov, Herschberger, Rodgers, Scott, Lewis, Derwood, and Chisholm offer poems that are, without exception, fair. Nemerov is perhaps the most successful, especially with *Notes on a New England Winter*. I miss Jarrell's best work, and Kenneth Allot hits the high note for pure mediocrity. It is not too much to say that the anthology is an improvement over that of 1940. It is also not too much to say that neither of them was excellent.

WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

About The Contributors

CARLOS BAKER, member of the English Department at Princeton, has just compiled a bibliography of the work of R. P. Blackmur.

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